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Implementation of the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (2010-2020)

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The General Assembly, in its resolution 62/195, declared 2010-2020 the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification. The present report is prepared pursuant to resolution 64/201, in which the Assembly designated the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa as the focal point for the Decade, called for the implementation of the Decade in collaboration with a broad range of stakeholders and United Nations entities and requested the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of the Decade at its sixty-ninth session. The report highlights the initiatives undertaken by the secretariat of the Convention, including efforts to carry out activities collaboratively with Member States, a range of stakeholders and other United Nations entities. Activities and initiatives to implement the Decade, with the objective of enhancing awareness of desertification, land degradation and drought issues, have included the organization of global and regional launches of the Decade; side events at various conferences; publications; web-based outreach; and support to the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought and other special events and activities.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 64/201, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its sixty-ninth session on progress made in implementing the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (2010-2020).

II. Background

2. Deeply concerned about the deteriorating situation of desertification in all regions, particularly in Africa, and its far-reaching implications for the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, in particular eradicating poverty, and taking into account the success of the International Year of Deserts and Desertification in raising awareness regarding desertification, land degradation and drought, the Assembly, by its resolution 62/195, declared the decade 2010-2020 as the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification.

3. Responding to the call by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa at its ninth session (see decision 30/COP.9), the General Assembly, in its resolution 64/201, invited parties to the Convention, observers, and other stakeholders to organize activities to observe the Decade with the aim of raising awareness about the causes of and solutions to ongoing land degradation and desertification under the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance implementation of the Convention (2008-2018), adopted at the eighth session of the Conference of the Parties. The Assembly further encouraged Member States and multilateral agencies in a position to do so to support the secretariat of the Convention financially and technically, with a view to supporting special initiatives in observance of the Decade as well as other observance events and activities worldwide. The Assembly further designated the secretariat of the Convention as the focal point of the Decade, in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and other relevant bodies of the United Nations, including the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat. It also requested the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly, at its sixty-ninth session, on the status of the implementation of the resolution.

III. Actions undertaken by the secretariat of the Convention

4. The secretariat of the Convention plans and reviews its activities on a biennial basis, and applied the same approach to Decade activities. States parties and observers reported to the Conference of the Parties on their activities, including Decade activities, using the performance review and assessment of implementation system based on the results-based management approach.

5. Based on guidance from the General Assembly and the Conference of the Parties (see decisions 30/COP.9, 31/COP.10 and 7/COP.11), the secretariat of the Convention initiated a number of activities to implement the Decade. Parties and to

the Convention and observers were invited to submit their plans for observance of the Decade at the local and national levels and an inter-agency task force was set up to prepare, in a collaborative manner, activities envisaged under the Decade. Other initiatives have included: organizing and hosting global observances of the World Day to Combat Desertification; organizing side events on desertification, land degradation and drought on the margins of major conferences; promoting joint activities on desertification, land degradation and drought with other agencies and United Nations entities; and publishing outreach materials.

6. The secretariat of the Convention, in collaboration with other United Nations entities, chose an overarching theme for each year of the Decade, with a view to advancing the objectives of the Decade by leveraging interlinkages with major global events. The annual themes were: forests (2010); biodiversity and drylands (2011); the green economy (2012); drought and water scarcity (2013); and ecosystem-based adaptation (2014). The key target groups for the activities were policy and decision makers, advocates and activists, children and youth and non-governmental organizations. Special focus was also given to mainstream and social media, with a view to amplifying the messages.

A. Plans and activities undertaken by States parties and observers to the Convention to advance the Decade

7. The Conference of the Parties, by its decision 31/COP.10, adopted at its tenth session, invited States parties, observers and intergovernmental organizations to submit to the secretariat, by 31 December 2010, proposals and contributions in the form of actions, activities and events to mark the Decade. It also requested the secretariat of the Convention to compile those contributions, to develop a programme in support of the Decade and to extend its partnership network to include representatives from civil society and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. In addition, it requested the secretariat to report to the Conference of the Parties at its eleventh session on voluntary actions and activities carried out by stakeholders to mark the Decade.

8. A total of 12 parties submitted reports to the Convention on their planned activities for the Decade. Reports were also submitted by 10 other organizations, including United Nations agencies and two non-governmental organizations. Most parties proposed to integrate their plans for the Decade into their own national agendas concerning desertification, land degradation and drought and to fulfil the priorities of the 10-year strategic plan and framework as part of their Decade-related activities.

9. National plans to implement the Decade included the organization of workshops or seminars on desertification, land degradation and drought, with the objective of building capacity, as a way to ensure that countries are committed to their national action programmes, based on the provisions of the Convention, and to align them with the objectives of the 10-year strategy and framework. Several national plans also included the organization of workshops and seminars to encourage participatory development, training in sustainable land management and the sharing of related research results. As part of the Decade activities, many parties also reported on the integration of their national action programmes with their

national development planning and their efforts to develop investment frameworks at the regional and/or local levels.

10. Activities envisaged by parties to the Convention to implement the Decade also included activities to raise awareness using media, marketing campaigns, film and global forums, especially on issues related to the availability, management and quality of and access to water and sanitation, and cultural events, including national festivals to celebrate drylands; sporting events; museum exhibits; and events that include education programmes targeting children and youth.

11. Some parties envisaged activities involving publications and expositions, as well as the organization of exchanges between experts and visits to projects showcasing success in combating desertification, as part of the celebration of the Decade. These included plans for awards and recognition for best practices in sustainable land management, to be presented during major observances, such as the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought.

12. During the eleventh session of the Conference of the Parties, 40 affected developing countries reported that they were implementing Decade activities. The countries were: Argentina, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, China, Cook Islands, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Hungary, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kuwait, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritius, Mongolia, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Portugal, Russian Federation, Sao Tome and Principe, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Syrian Arab Republic, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Uzbekistan and Viet Nam. Four developed countries, Czech Republic, Germany, Italy and Switzerland, also reported that they were implementing Decade activities.

B. Collaboration and partnership with United Nations entities to advance the Decade

13. With a view to advancing the objectives of the Decade in collaboration with other United Nations entities, and bearing in mind the guidance from resolution 64/201 and decision 30/COP.9, the Executive Secretary of the Convention initiated the establishment of an inter-agency task force and invited United Nations entities, including UNEP, UNDP, IFAD and the Department of Public Information to participate. Following the guidance received from decision 31/COP.10, the membership of the task force was expanded to include the following intergovernmental organizations: the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Global Environment Facility, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Forum on Forests, the World Agroforestry Organization and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

14. The mandate entrusted to the inter-agency task force was to plan and develop Decade events, bearing in mind the 10-year strategy and framework and Conference decisions. The task force was also mandated to support Decade events and to ensure that the momentum for action is maintained throughout the decade.

15. The inter-agency task force has developed a strategy and plan of action for the Decade, which was presented to the parties to the Convention at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, which took note of it (see decision 31/COP.10). The strategy and plan of action takes into account the concern expressed by the Assembly about the increasing desertification in all regions, with its far-reaching implications for the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, particularly those of eradicating poverty and ensuring environmental sustainability. It provides a focused framework for strategic action, but is considered a "living document" that can respond to global changes. In this regard, the thematic focus of each year is to be aligned with campaigns and activities in progress throughout the United Nations system.

16. By the end of the Decade, the goal is for the international community to be sensitized and committed to preserving and improving drylands and desert ecosystems and to addressing desertification and land degradation through sustainable land management for the eradication of poverty, improved local livelihoods and the attainment of environmental sustainability.

17. To achieve this, the strategy and plan of action specifies two objectives for the Decade: (a) to transmit a clear, concise and powerful message about the value of drylands and desert ecosystems and the effects of desertification, land degradation and drought; and (b) to create a global coalition of individuals, organizations and institutions at all levels to promote sustainable land management in drylands and desert ecosystems.

18. Starting in 2012, in the light of the submissions of parties following decision 31/COP.10 (discussed in the next subsection), the task force focused its activities on a few major initiatives, including supporting the observance of World Day to Combat Desertification); web-based outreach focused on youth; the organization of thematic side events; and the development of materials for advocacy on desertification, land degradation and drought.

19. The task force takes a pragmatic approach to its work, serving mostly as an advisory and coordination mechanism. Decisions on plans and activities are undertaken in consultation with all members, but the implementation of Decade activities may be undertaken among only a few partners. This collaboration has resulted in significant outreach to the general public, most notably through mainstream and social media, the use of which has improved data gathering on the impact of such outreach campaigns.

20. From time to time, the task force has also organized Decade activities, including the launch of the Decade in August 2010; the global observance of the World Decade for Cultural Development, in Ghent, Belgium, in 2013, and at the headquarters of the World Bank, in Washington, D.C., in 2014; an observance event for the Equator Initiative, a partnership for resilient communities led by UNDP, in Nairobi, at which the Equator Prize for Sustainable Land Management in Sub-Saharan Africa was awarded for the first time; and a kick-off campaign for the World Decade for Cultural Development, in March 2014, on the margins of Africa Environment Day/Wangari Maathai Day, held in Lesotho. The task force has also advanced the objectives of the Decade by supporting these and other Decade events through the development of written materials, such as a book entitled *Land for Life*, and outreach to the public and to mainstream and social media, including encouraging the heads of agencies to issue video messages.

C. Global and regional observances

21. The Decade was launched on 16 August 2010, in Fortaleza, Brazil, at the Second International Conference of Climate, Variability, Sustainability and Development. The global launch drew more than 2,500 participants from 100 countries, with high-ranking government officials, including ministers from Brazil, the Niger, Senegal and Switzerland, as well as governors and high-ranking officials from various institutions and heads of intergovernmental agencies participating in related activities. In anticipation of the International Year of Forests, scheduled for 2011, the theme for the launch was the value of dryland forests, with the rallying call, "forests keep the drylands working".

22. In his message noting the launch of the Decade, the Secretary-General stated that continued land degradation, whether from climate change, unsustainable agriculture or the poor management of water resources, was a threat to food security, would lead to starvation among the most acutely affected communities and would rob the world of productive land. The Secretary-General noted that desertification, land degradation and drought generated localized conflict as well as broader tensions, with migration posing risks of social breakdown and instability in increasingly crowded urban areas. Ministers from Algeria, Argentina, Bhutan and Germany, as well as the heads of the secretariats of the Convention on Biological Diversity, FAO, IFAD, UNDP, the Department of Public Information, UNEP, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and WMO, sent messages for the launch in support of the Decade. The event was covered by a wide range of media, including Agence France Presse and Inter Press Service, contributing to raising awareness of desertification, land degradation and drought.

23. Regional launches were also organized, including one for the African region, co-organized with UNEP and UNDP, which took place concurrently with the global launch, on 16 August 2010, at UNEP Headquarters in Nairobi. Among the keynote speakers were the Deputy Executive Director of UNEP, the resident representative of UNDP, the Deputy Director General of the World Agroforestry Center, the Director General of the National Environment Management Authority of Kenya and a representative of indigenous communities living in drylands of Kenya.

24. The launch for the Asia-Pacific region took place on 12 October 2010, in Seoul, during an international symposium on the mitigation of desertification, land degradation and drought and the role of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. The event highlighted the threats of desertification, land degradation and drought in Asia, where they affect more people than in any other region of the world. Organized by the Korea Forest Service, the symposium drew more than 200 participants, including ministers, governors, scientists, policymakers and media organizations.

25. The North American launch was hosted by Colorado State University, in Fort Collins, Colorado, and the State Legislature, in Denver, United States of America, on 11 and 12 November 2010. The launch ceremony was followed by short seminars addressing land degradation issues in North America and the signing of a letter of intent between the Convention secretariat and the university to work closely on future research on desertification. With speakers from academia and the United Nations as well as government and civil society organizations, the presentations and discussion focused on the role of science in efforts to combat desertification. More

than 15 media outlets in the United States, including the *Denver Post* and the *San Francisco Examiner*, reported on the regional launch.

26. The European launch was held on 16 December 2010, in London, and focused on exploring the links between drylands and global human security, with a special focus on Europe, including the state of its soil degradation. It was jointly organized by the Convention, UNEP and the World Conservation Monitoring Center, with speakers drawn from the United Nations and academic and non-governmental organizations. The event was covered by major European and global media, including *The Guardian* and *Nature*.

27. On 15 and 16 December 2011, the Government of Algeria hosted a global observance event at the Timimoun Oasis and Tinerkouk Oasis and Castle (Adrar), in the Sahara, with the aim of demonstrating the economic value of desert ecosystems. The event included performances by the Fioretto Orchestra of Vienna and the celebrated South African gospel singer and Drylands Ambassador for the Convention, Deborah Fraser. A round table of policymakers and the media was held on the theme "Land-restoration initiatives leading to a land-degradation-neutral world", with a view to raising awareness about the related issues in preparation for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012.

28. A number of products, including brochures, fact sheets, success stories, posters, stickers, a website, a newsletter, lapel pins and press materials, were also developed to publicize the global and regional launches and observances. The materials and success stories were tailored to the needs of each regional launch. There was substantial media attention to the events globally, including interviews with the experts. The events that most successfully contributed to advancing the objectives of the Decade were those that were backed by local hosts with essential resources, including media contacts and contacts for civil society and private sector participants and policymakers.

D. Support to celebrations and observances for World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought

29. The Convention secretariat, in collaboration with other stakeholders, including United Nations entities, has also sought to advance the objectives of the Decade through celebrations organized to commemorate World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought. World Day, which has been held every year on 17 June, starting in 1995, was proclaimed in 1994 by resolution 49/115. Its objective is to promote public awareness on international cooperation to combat desertification and the effects of drought and the implementation of the provisions of the Convention in affected countries. World Day events are organized at the national level, and since 2011, the secretariat of the Convention has been organizing a global observance event at a location outside its headquarters. Since the proclamation of the Decade, five global observances have been held. Since the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, the parties and observers to the Convention and the task force have provided substantive inputs for World Day events.

30. The theme chosen for World Day to Combat Desertification in 2012 was "The management and use of land in a green economy", with a view to leveraging interest around the Conference on Sustainable Development in order to create awareness about desertification, land degradation and drought. The global observance of World

Day was held in June 2012, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, under the theme "Healthy soil sustains your life: let's go land degradation neutral". The theme sought to broaden public and policy engagement on the desertification and land degradation issues that were in negotiation at the same time at the Conference. The Secretary-General issued a message stressing that global efforts to halt and reverse land degradation were integral to creating "the future we want", and pointed out that sustainable land use was a prerequisite to lifting billions from poverty, enabling food and nutrition security and safeguarding water supplies, and, indeed, constituted a cornerstone of sustainable development. Emphasizing that the people living in the world's arid lands, which constitute more than 40 per cent of the planet's land mass, were among the poorest and most vulnerable to hunger, he said that the Millennium Development Goals could not be achieved by 2015 without preserving the soils on which the subsistence of these people depended. Without healthy soil, he pointed out, life on Earth would be unsustainable.

31. The global observance of World Day to Combat Desertification was held in Ghent, Belgium, on 17 June 2013, under the theme "Drought and water scarcity" and the slogan "Don't let our future dry up". The purpose was to create awareness of the risks of drought and water scarcity in the drylands and beyond; to draw attention to the importance of water cooperation in efforts to mitigate drought; and to call attention to the importance of sustaining healthy soils, as a follow-up to the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, as well as in the context of the post-2015 sustainable development agenda and the sustainable development goals. The event was co-hosted by UNESCO, the United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health, the University of Ghent and the City of Ghent, Belgium, in the context of their international conference on the sustainable management of marginal drylands-reviewing 10 years of research on land conservation and sustainable development.

32. The Secretary-General also issued a message on the occasion of World Day to Combat Desertification in 2013, calling for a collective global response to drought and a shift from crisis management to drought preparedness and resilience. He indicated that the price for preparedness was minimal compared with the cost of disaster relief, and that droughts could be mitigated, and he called for the full implementation of the outcomes of the high-level meeting on national drought policy, held in Geneva, in March 2013. The Secretary-General also called for implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development related to avoiding and offsetting land degradation.

33. The commemorative event on the occasion of World Day to Combat Desertification in 2014 included a global observance at the headquarters of the World Bank, in Washington, D.C. The Prime Minister of the Niger and the Minister of Environment and Tourism of Namibia delivered keynote addresses on ecosystem-based adaptation. The theme for the Day, "Land belongs to the future, let's climate proof it", was chosen to raise awareness about the growing threats of climate change, which are linked to desertification and land degradation. The Prime Minister of the Niger cited growing risks, such as conflict, loss of life, falling agricultural production, food insecurity and disease in the Niger, linked to intensifying desertification and land degradation owing to climate change impacts, such as increased temperatures, shorter rainy seasons and the drying up of Lake Chad. He cited the African Great Green Wall as an important initiative to restore degraded areas and improve the conditions of the inhabitants of the drylands of

Africa. The Minister of Environment and Tourism of Namibia emphasized the importance of seizing the moment to promote a land-degradation-neutral world and stressed the importance of monitoring land-degradation neutrality, both under the Convention and the post-2015 development process. The Executive Secretary of the Convention, Monique Barbut, called for practical and empowering adaptation measures in all countries and highlighted simple and affordable sustainable land management practices. She suggested that food, water, income and security threats could be eased if common measures of success were established at the global level, sensible investments made in sustainable land use practices and safety nets created.

E. Decade observance on the margins of major conferences and events

34. With the aim of outreach to untapped constituencies and stakeholders, and advancing the objectives of the Decade, the secretariat of the Convention, in collaboration with other United Nations entities and relevant stakeholders, has also organized side events on the margins of major conferences and events. These events attracted attention to the interlinkages between desertification, land degradation and drought and themes such as climate change, biodiversity, the green economy and building resilience to natural disasters, such as drought.

35. An example of such a side event was the "Dialogue and planning session — observances of the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification", which was held at the tenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, in Changwon, Republic of Korea. Discussion focused on the outcomes envisioned by the end of the Decade, in 2020. The outputs included key messages for dissemination during the 2012 and 2013 observances of World Day to Combat Desertification. The Convention, WMO and UNDP were the lead organizers. Another significant example was the side event for civil society organizations entitled "Sustainable land management, can we make a difference? What is the cost?", which was held on 6 December 2011 at the Rio Conventions Pavilion, in Durban, South Africa, on the occasion of the seventeenth session of the United Nations Climate Change Conference. The event introduced the concept of "a land-degradation-neutral world", as well as cases and lessons learned about the costs of rehabilitating degraded rangelands and croplands. Discussion focused on successful examples of land restoration.

36. Another side event organized under the framework of the Decade took place in June 2012, at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, in Rio de Janeiro. Entitled "Re-greening for resilient landscapes: pastoralists and farmers stewarding ecosystems and economic returns in drylands", it was co-hosted by the Governments of Algeria and the Niger, and organized in partnership with World Vision International, International Partners for Sustainable Agriculture, the Citizens Network for Sustainable Development, the Savory Institute, the World Agroforestry Center and the Convention. The event showcased large-scale initiatives to restore and rehabilitate degraded agricultural and rangeland areas, with a view to demonstrating that the target of a land-degradation-neutral world is feasible. These methods include integrated farming practices, the use of livestock in holistic management, trees for evergreen agriculture and natural regeneration managed by

small-scale farmers. One major outcome was the announcement of the creation of a global network on evergreen agriculture.

37. In December 2012, at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Doha, a side event entitled "Grasslands climate change mitigation and adaptation potential" was held with a view to: (a) demonstrating the mitigation and adaptation potential associated with the rehabilitation of degraded grasslands and the role of livestock keepers in reversing degradation; and (b) presenting the use and measurement methods associated with national action plans (low emission development strategies, nationally appropriate mitigation actions) using projects in selected countries as examples. It was co-organized by the Government of Mongolia, the secretariat of the Convention and FAO, among others. The event highlighted that grasslands may experience small changes per hectare but that, owing to their vastness, they can store impressive stocks of carbon; that building carbon stocks in grasslands is compatible with livestock-based livelihoods; and that some grazing practices and integrated crop-livestock-tree systems can be scaled up.

38. In March 2013, a major side event was organized on the margins of the high-level meeting on national drought policy, in Geneva. Entitled "Practical steps to drought preparedness and risk management", it was designed to draw attention to the lack of drought preparedness and its implications in almost all countries of the world. It was pointed out that reactive and post-impact approaches and responses not only increase socioeconomic costs and vulnerability but also reduce the resilience of affected communities and ecosystems in the face of future droughts. The side event focused on: (a) innovative measures to monitor and manage drought, with examples drawn from the arid areas of Brazil; (b) measures to increase household resilience, with a focus on Kenya; (c) the role of wetlands and forest ecosystems in enhancing the provision of freshwater and strengthening livelihoods; and (d) concrete opportunities and practical steps for the general public to learn about and support forest and landscape restoration. The event also marked the start of the 2012 campaign for World Day to Combat Desertification, with the rallying call "Don't let our future dry up". It was co-hosted by the Convention on Biological Diversity, WMO and UNDP, and was held in partnership with the Ceará Foundation for Meteorology and Water Resources of Brazil.

39. In April 2013, a side event entitled "Dry forests: drought, water scarcity and the global development agenda" was held at the United Nations Forum on Forests, in Istanbul. The aim of the event, which was co-organized with the Department of Public Information and the United Nations Forum on Forests, was to share experiences and lessons learned in sustainably managing and restoring dry forests and to raise awareness of the links among deforestation, ecosystem degradation and drought. The event highlighted: (a) the benefits of dryland forest ecosystem restoration; (b) progress in dryland forestation and awareness raising in Turkey; and (c) proposals for global guidelines on restoring the resilience of forest landscapes. It included speakers from the African Forest Forum, the Turkish Foundation for Combating Soil Erosion, for Reforestation and the Protection of Natural Habitats, a non-governmental organization, and FAO. Discussion focused on the implications of improved dry forest management for drought risk reduction.

40. In September 2013, Gender Day was organized in Windhoek, under the theme "Drylands women's empowerment", on the margins of the eleventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification. Participants

examined the status of gender policies in the drylands, in the light of present and anticipated challenges, and identified critical gaps and policy action needed to address the situation. The event had four objectives: (a) to review current and emerging gender policy issues in the drylands; (b) to strengthen the participation of Namibia in Decade activities; (c) to learn from the experience of Namibia in gender-related work in desertification, sustainable land management and drought mitigation; and (d) to learn from the experiences of other regions in gender-related work in desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management and drought mitigation.

41. Participants in the meeting included ministers, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Namibia, high-ranking officials of the United Nations, diplomats and representatives of civil society, academic and intergovernmental organizations. The Deputy Speaker of the National Council of the Republic of Namibia delivered the keynote address. The event examined the advances in women's empowerment over the past two decades, the emerging challenges and opportunities for women living in drylands, empowerment to improve livelihoods at household and community levels, the means to gender equality and equity and follow-up action. Organized in partnership with the University of Namibia, and with support from the Convention, the Government of Finland and UNDP, the event produced outputs that were included in the Namib Declaration on a stronger United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification for a land-degradation-neutral world.

F. Joint observances and other special initiatives to advance the objective of the Decade

42. A number of joint events and other special events at the national or local level have also been organized by the secretariat of the Convention in collaboration with parties to the Convention, United Nations entities and relevant stakeholders to advance the objectives of the Decade. Examples include four observances that were held in 2011 to jointly mark the Decade of Deserts and the Fight against Desertification and the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity.

43. The first joint observance of the two Decades was held on 4 July 2011, in Havana, during the launch of the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity in the Caribbean countries, on the occasion of the Eighth International Convention on Environment and Development. Among the nearly 1,000 participants from 35 countries were the Vice-President of Cuba, ministers from Angola, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Haiti and the Executive Secretaries of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention to Combat Desertification. The Executive Secretary of the Convention to Combat Desertification emphasized the importance of the fight against desertification and the loss of biodiversity, pointing out that scientific evidence showed strong links among water, soil and forests, and he said that the coincidence of the two Decades was a call to advance such understanding.

44. The second joint observance was held on 22 July 2011, in Addis Ababa, during the regional launch of the Decade on Biodiversity. The President of Ethiopia delivered a speech at the event. Other high-ranking officials also addressed the event, including the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, representatives of Japan and Argentina and a United Nations Goodwill Ambassador, Edward Norton.

45. On 18 October 2011, a ministerial event was hosted by the Government of the Republic of Korea for the joint observance of the Decade on Biological Diversity and the Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification. It took place on the occasion of the tenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification, and included a panel discussion whose theme was "A synergetic and coherent implementation of the United Nations Decades on Biodiversity and for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification". The event was attended by 35 ministers and high-ranking United Nations representatives from WMO, the Convention to Combat Desertification, the Convention on Biological Diversity, UNEP, UNDP and the United Nations Forum on Forests. The presentations highlighted the contributions of various stakeholders towards advancing the objectives of the two Decades. The Convention to Combat Desertification and UNDP also formally launched the full version of their joint assessment report entitled "The Forgotten Billion: Millennium Development Goals Achievement in the Drylands". The report details the plight of the 1 billion people living in poverty in the drylands and points out that addressing the plight of the "forgotten billion" is essential for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

46. On 23 October 2012, a local observance of the Decade, featuring an exhibition entitled "Expanding Deserts: A Global Concern", was held at the Bruce Museum, in Greenwich, Connecticut, United States; the exhibition ran from August 2012 to March 2013. Convention Drylands Ambassador Leila Lopes, Miss Universe 2011, delivered the keynote address. The event consisted of a three-part lecture series that delved into the issues and opportunities related to deserts.

47. On 11 November 2011, a joint observance was held at UNESCO headquarters in Paris at the launch of the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity. The Director General of UNESCO presided over the ceremony, which was attended by more than 80 participants. The Director General highlighted the integrated, multidisciplinary approach of the organization's new biodiversity initiative aimed at the effective implementation of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, while addressing desertification, land degradation and drought. The outcomes of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on addressing desertification, land degradation and drought in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, held on 20 September 2011, were also presented at the event.

48. On 14 December 2012, a special event was organized during the Bonn International Model United Nations, with a view to creating awareness among youth about the objectives of the Decade. An online campaign targeting children and youth, entitled "Going land degradation neutral" was launched. The purpose of the event was to raise awareness about the outcomes of the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development on desertification, land degradation and drought. The publicity materials, including the design of a website geared to young people, video stories, articles and quizzes, were developed and produced by young people.

G. Awareness raising advocacy

49. Raising awareness about desertification, land degradation and drought is a crucial component of the Decade. In addition to the organization of events and joint

observances, specific products have been developed to enhance targeted outreach to a wide range of stakeholders, to heighten the visibility of the activities and to ensure that United Nations norms are reflected in the campaigns. These products include resources for branding, such as logos and brochures, as well as films and books and the organization of film festivals.

50. Examples of such advocacy products include the website for the launch of the Decade, which was developed in 2010, and provided background information, key reports, photo galleries, databases and toolkits for various actors. Success stories of land restoration around the world and fact sheets have been posted on the website. In 2013, the report "Land for life: managing land sustainably for better livelihoods" was published and launched on the margins of the eleventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention. The publication showcases 40 innovative approaches and solutions to combating desertification and land degradation that are effectively tackling the challenges of poverty, deforestation, climate change, loss of biodiversity, water scarcity or food security, or are effective in raising awareness. Written in accessible language, the report provides a short introduction about the intersection between land degradation and each of these challenges, followed by cases that demonstrate different ways in which individuals, organizations or governments are addressing them. The report highlights activities in 34 countries: Argentina, Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, China, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Ghana, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Israel, Jordan, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Mexico, Namibia, Netherlands, Niger, Nigeria, Philippines, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Togo, Turkey, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Uzbekistan and Zimbabwe.

51. Two films have been produced to advance the objectives of the Decade. United Nations Television and Video supported the production of a short documentary about land degradation and water scarcity in Latin America entitled *Brazil: Desertification*. Filmed in the dryland areas of north-eastern Brazil, in 2010, the film shows the links among land management, land degradation, water scarcity and migration. The film also showcases successful initiatives to restore the land and improve water access, even in times of drought. The second film, entitled *Regreening Ethiopia's Highlands*, produced in 2014 with the support of the World Bank and TerrAfrica, demonstrates the benefits of large-scale restoration in degraded areas through the story of the remarkable transformation taking place in Ethiopia through sustainable land management interventions.

52. During the eleventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, a film festival on desertification, land degradation and drought was organized as one of the Decade events. Among the films screened were *A Thirsty World*, *The Man Who Stopped the Desert*, *Colours of the Deserts* and *Dirt! The Movie*.

53. *A Thirsty World* (*La soif du monde*) (2012), by Yann Arthus-Bertrand, highlights the situation of fresh water in 20 countries of Europe, Africa, Asia and America. *Dirt! The Movie* (2010), by Bill Benenson and Gene Rosow, is about soil, the Earth's most valuable and underappreciated source of land fertility. *The Man Who Stopped the Desert*, by Mark Dodd, is about a remarkable peasant farmer in Burkina Faso whose ingenious farming methods have provided the key to achieving what has eluded many experts in the Sahel: arresting desertification. The last three films are from the series *Colours of the Deserts* (2011), by the German public-service broadcaster Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen, and demonstrate the value of

desert ecosystems. *The Red Colorado Plateau* explains how the plateau was formed, the role the desert plays in conserving the Colorado River and the land's cultural value for various communities. *The White Uyuni* explores the Salar de Uyuni desert, the world's largest salt flat, located at the crest of the Andes, in Bolivia. The film presents its uniqueness and economic value, and the ways in which it has shaped the music, religious rituals and gender roles among the local people. *The Yellow Sahara* focuses on the North African part of the desert. Over the course of a 10-day journey, the narrator presents its beauty and the various cultures of its inhabitants. Each film was preceded by a brief introduction and followed by a half-hour discussion between the public and experts on each subject, drawn from among Conference participants.

54. Other materials developed for awareness raising on desertification, land degradation and drought include a customized web portal designed for children and youth.

IV. Lessons learned

55. The United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification, established by the General Assembly, has served to enhance awareness about desertification, land degradation and drought and the need to strengthen implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification. This has been reflected in the outcomes of the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, where world leaders recognized that desertification and land degradation were global phenomena affecting all regions, particularly developing countries, and committed to strive towards a land-degradation-neutral world. The secretariat of the Convention has also built partnerships and drawn on the United Nations system to enhance public outreach and advocacy to a range of stakeholders on the issues of desertification and land degradation, in order to advance the objectives of the Convention. Such a collaborative approach has enabled the secretariat to leverage human and financial resources for collective action through the joint organization of events. However, as envisioned in resolution 64/201, additional resources are still needed to make the Decade an effective mechanism for reaching new constituencies in all regions, including nurturing a new generation of young people informed about the global impacts of desertification and land degradation.

56. Planning ahead for the remaining years of the Decade, and bearing in mind projections from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which reveal a deteriorating water situation globally, with the poorest people hardest hit by the impacts of droughts and floods, it is clear that the observances, events and activities for the Decade will be crucial to highlighting options that strengthen the adaptation and resilience of poor populations, especially those living in degrading ecosystems. To do so, the secretariat envisages a number of activities to advance the objectives of the Decade. These include efforts to build on the success of the *Land for Life* publication, by envisaging more publications on the benefits of combating land degradation, in terms of wealth creation, adaptation to climate change, food and water security and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

57. There is also still untapped potential for outreach and advocacy through social media and other web-based platforms.

V. Recommendations

58. **The General Assembly may wish to take note of the activities and initiatives undertaken to advance the objectives of the Decade so far and to renew the call to Member States, regional commissions and multilateral agencies to consider supporting the secretariat of the Convention in organizing special initiatives in observance of the Decade as well as other observance events and activities worldwide. The Assembly may also wish to encourage foundations and private sector and civil society organizations to support and contribute to activities that advance the objectives of the Decade.**

59. **Recognizing the opportunity that the Decade presents to educate young people about good land stewardship, the Assembly may wish to emphasize the need for strengthening outreach activities among children and youth, with a view to raising generations with an appreciation of the future impacts of climate change on the land.**